

Department of Surgery hosts 26th annual trauma conference

USU celebrated its 26th Annual Surgery for Trauma Day August 25 in Sanford Auditorium.

The day-long event featured prominent guest lecturers, including Michael Rotondo, M.D, the William R. Drucker distinguished surgical lecturer. Dr. Rotondo is professor and Chairman for the Department of Surgery and Chief, Center of Excellence for Trauma and Surgical Critical Care at Pitt County Memorial Hospital in North Carolina. The Martin Silverstein distinguished surgical lecturer was John Armstrong, M.D., from the University of South Florida College of Medicine in Tampa, where he is associate professor of Surgery and Medical Director of the Center for Advanced Medical Learning and Simulation.

Several other distinguished speakers participated, including Dr. Jonathan Woodson, the Assistant Secretary of Defense for Health Affairs and Dr. Robert Dodson (USU, SoM '86), surgeon and president of the medical staff at the St. John's Regional Medical Center in Joplin, Missouri.

Dr. Dodson's speech titled "Experience with the Joplin Tornado," highlighted how his USU education and military trauma training helped lay the groundwork for the successful medical support of the city following that May 22, 2011 tornado that struck his hospital.

"You have to be prepared," said Dodson, who retired from the Air Force. "This school (USU) is all about giving people the tools to make good decisions."

After the tornado ripped through Joplin, the St. John's hospital was the only medical facility still standing, but it had sustained major damage.

"The only thing worse than being hit by a tornado is being the only surviving hospital," Dodson said.

Despite a ruined medical facility, limited supplies and practically no electronic communication capability, these medical professionals addressed more than 350 casualties within the first hour after the tornado.

"It was difficult, but we went from nothing to fully capable in seven days," he said.

The casualty count would continue to rise until more than 1,500 casualties were seen. In total, more than 150 people lost their lives in the storm, including six people who were in the hospital when the tornado hit.

But through this tragic event, Dodson wanted to provide a specific message to the students at USU – quality training will empower them to succeed despite the situation and austere setting.

“Not only will you learn disaster planning here – you will learn it and you will live it,” Dodson said. “One day you will have to do this. So take advantage of the experience you have here.”